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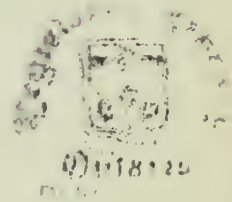
SOCIAL REFORM

Being a Few Plain Words on a
Suppressed Subject.

BY

HARRY ROBERTS. 1671-1946

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brief

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Socialism and Population.

OF all the objections which have been urged against Socialism none is more common than what is known as the Malthusian objection; the objection, namely, that any improvement which we might effect in the condition of the people would be at once, or at any rate ultimately, nullified owing to the ruinous increase of population which would inevitably follow. From very early times an occasional thinker seems to have had some vague idea that population requires to be artificially restricted. Thus Aristotle, in his "Politics" (Book vii., cap. 16) says:—"With respect to the bringing up of children, let it be a law that nothing maimed or imperfect shall be brought up; but, in order to avoid an excess of population, let some law be laid down, if it be not permitted by the customs and habits of the people, that any of the children born shall be exposed; for a limit must be fixed to the population of the state." In his Essay on Seditions and Troubles, Bacon says that "Generally it is to be foreseen that the population of a kingdom, especially if it be not mown down by wars, do not exceed the stock of the kingdom which should maintain it." Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Joseph Child, Montesquieu and Hume may also be named among those pre-Malthusian philosophers who had more or less suspected the evils attending an excessive population. But the law was first clearly enunciated at the close of the last century, that "There is a constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it."

In 1798 there appeared in London an anonymous volume entitled "An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society," being a reply to an article of William Godwin on the "Prodigality of Avarice," which appeared in the *Inquirer* the year before. The Population Essay was written "on the impulse of th

occasion, and from the few materials within reach in a country situation." Naturally, therefore, it was very incomplete; and accordingly, the author, having meanwhile made a tour through the leading countries of Europe, published in 1803 a second edition of his work. In this edition the author's name was given as the Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus, well known as a student of history and economics. In his great work he presented an immense array of facts, and an excellent description of the various positive checks which had operated at different times and in different countries in keeping down the population; and he showed that if these checks be removed, without being replaced by others, population inevitably increases to that point where starvation steps in and arrests its career. At the time at which Malthus wrote, an example of such a rapid increase was afforded by the New World. "It appears from some recent calculations and estimates," he says, "that from the first settlement in America to the year 1800, the periods of doubling have been but very little above twenty years." This result he arrived at by examining the returns to Congress in 1782 and 1790, and by making allowance for immigration from Europe and for the descendants of the immigrants. He found that during these nine years the population had increased by more than sixty per cent., and that consequently "the period of doubling *at this rate* would be less than sixteen years." "It may safely be pronounced therefore," he concludes, "that population, when unchecked, goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years, or increases in a geometrical proportion. A thousand millions are just as easily doubled every twenty-five years by the power of population as a thousand. But the food to supply the larger number will by no means be obtained with the same facility. When acre has been added to acre, till all the fertile land has been occupied, the yearly increase of food must depend upon the melioration of the land already in possession. This is a stream which, from the nature of all soils, instead of increasing, must be constantly diminishing. If it be allowed that by the best possible policy, and by great encouragements to agriculture, the average produce of this island could be doubled in the next twenty-five years, it will be allowing probably a greater increase than could with justice be expected. In the next twenty-five years, it

is impossible to suppose that the produce could be quadrupled. It would be contrary to all our knowledge of the properties of land."

Unfortunately, it is only too easy to obtain recent statistics which fully support Malthus' main contention. Thus we learn that in 1888 the birth-rate in the parish of Fulham was 48 per thousand inhabitants; and that the death-rate in New Zealand was about 10 per thousand. Taking these rates together, we find that population tends to double itself about every twenty years. As a matter of fact, however, there can be no doubt but that the death-rate in New Zealand might be considerably reduced; in which case a still smaller number of years would suffice to double the population. Now it is absurd to imagine that we shall be able to constantly double our food supply every twenty years; and it therefore becomes important, if we wish to diminish our death-rate, that we shall diminish our birth-rate at the same time.

Such, briefly, is the contention of the school of economists known as Malthusians; and, as here stated, must receive the acquiescence of every impartial student. Unfortunately for progress, however, some prominent Malthusians have not been content to stop where we have stopped, but have gone on to maintain that it is idle to attempt to better the condition of our fellows by external forces; alleging that only *after* the working population has been induced to limit the size of its families will any reform be permanent in its effect. It is only necessary to refer to the fact that the average earnings of the workers of this country have increased from £38 per capita in 1867 to £42 14s. in 1884, to show that a rise in the material condition of the community is possible in spite of the law of population. This brings us to one of the fallacies of the unenlightened Malthusian, the fallacy that pressure of population can drive wages down to the level of bare subsistence. It is now allowed by almost all economists of repute that competition wages of unskilled labor are fixed, not by bare subsistence, but by the standard of comfort which the particular grade of workers considers necessary. It is commonly supposed that Ricardo held the opposite opinion, but the following passage from his writings may serve to take away the last support which the bare-subsistence Malthusians are sup-

posed to possess. In the fifth chapter of his "Principles," Ricardo says: "The friends of humanity cannot but wish that in all countries the laboring classes should have a taste for comforts and enjoyments, and that they should be stimulated by all legal means in their exertions to procure them. There cannot be a better security against a superabundant population. In those countries where the laboring classes have the fewest wants, and are contented with the cheapest food, the people are exposed to the greatest vicissitudes and miseries." It is interesting in this connection to trace the co-temporary growth of capital and population in England, from which we learn that, despite the rapid growth of population, capital has grown even more rapidly, so that the amount of capital per head has been steadily increasing.

GROWTH OF CAPITAL AND POPULATION IN ENGLAND.

Year.		Population in millions.		Property in millions sterling.		Property per head.
1600	...	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	...	100	...	£22
1680	...	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	...	250	...	46
1690	...	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	...	320	...	58
1720	...	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	...	370	...	57
1750	...	7	...	500	...	71
1800	...	9	...	1,500	...	167
1812	...	17	...	2,700	...	160
1822	...	21	...	2,500	...	120
1833	...	25	...	3,600	...	144
1845	...	28	...	4,000	...	143
1865	...	30	...	6,000	...	200
1875	...	33	...	8,500	...	260
1887	...	37	...	10,000	...	270

Thus we see that wealth has been steadily increasing while population, to use Mr. Lyttleton's phrase, "has been content to follow at a respectful distance." Once the standard of comfort has been raised, it is very difficult to force it back; it would be almost impossible, for example, to compel English laborers of to-day to accept such wages as those with which their ancestors were content. Everything which tends to raise the standard of comfort tends to check population; and this is one of the great advantages of education, for it is only after a thing has been desired that

the desire can develop into a need. As Bastiat pointed out, "It is a phenomenon well worthy of remark, how quickly, by continuous satisfaction, what was at first only a vague desire, becomes a taste, and what was only a taste, becomes a want, and even a want of the most imperious kind."

The very low standard of comfort possessed by the natives of India and China is the main cause of the sad over-population in those countries. Of these people Buckle remarked (*Hist. of Civilization*, pp. 52, 53): "From the earliest period to which our knowledge of India extends, an immense majority of the people, pinched by the most galling poverty, and just living from hand to mouth, always have remained in a state of stupid debasement." We have recently been told that the quantity of food considered sufficient by the native Hindoo can be purchased for a half-penny a day. Such is their standard of comfort, and to this level they breed. Nor is there any likelihood of their birth-rate diminishing until their standard of comfort has been raised. It is probably due to the sudden rise in this standard, after the Revolution, that the French peasant has become so prudent in the matter of his family. It will therefore be quite unnecessary to spend any more time in combating the contention of the unscientific, no-facts-Malthusians, that population keeps, and must always keep, wages down to such a point that bare subsistence only is obtainable. We will pass at once to the consideration of the arguments of the modern scientific Neo-Malthusians who oppose Socialist reforms as being too large or too sudden, and quite valueless without a simultaneous recognition of the Law of Population.

We may as well allow, at once, that there undoubtedly does exist, at present, a tendency in population to increase more rapidly than the means of subsistence can be increased. "Yes," rejoins Mr. Henry George, "but how is it, then, that this globe of ours, after all the thousands, and it is now thought millions, of years, that man has been upon the earth, is yet so thinly peopled?" Of course it is obvious that the tendency of population to outrun subsistence could not at any time be converted into a reality. Man cannot live without food, and therefore, unless some other repressing force be applied, there is always starvation at the back to take the place of other checks. It is very

important that we should carefully consider these restraining agents, for it is chiefly from a misconception on this head that the opposition to Malthusianism arises.

These checks were classified by Malthus under two heads—positive or destructive, and preventive. Under the former he included famine, disease, war, and the various other agents of death; under the latter, prostitution, late marriages, and parental prudence.

Examples of the devastation produced by famine must be familiar to everyone. The great Irish famine of 1847, for instance, caused the death of such an immense number, that the population of Ireland was put back more than thirty years. Now it is worth mentioning that, while the people were dying from lack of food on all sides, potatoes were actually being exported from Ireland to pay rent to idle landlords.

We must not, however, in our hatred of this feature, be led to conclude that, but for private landlordism, the famine would never have occurred. For it is practically certain that the peasants would have bred up to the extended limit of subsistence in the same way as they actually did to the existing narrower limit.

The great cause of famines is the habit of peopling down to a very low standard of comfort. This explains the frequency and magnitude of famines in India. In one of his speeches, Mr. John Bright said that out of a total population of 250,000,000, an immense section lives on not more than £2 per annum for each individual. It is very easy to see that when, from any cause, the land is not quite so fruitful as usual, general starvation is the inevitable result.

In past times a great part has been played by such epidemics as the black-death, sweating sickness, small-pox, and the like. The effect of such outbreaks as that which occurred in the fourteenth century can scarcely be imagined. Hecker calculated that, during the worst period, Cairo lost from 10,000 to 15,000 daily. In China, more than thirteen millions are said to have died; Tartary, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Armenia were covered with dead bodies; and in Cæsarea none were left alive. It was reported to Pope Clement that throughout the East 23,840,000 people had fallen victims to the plague, and in Avignon he found it

necessary to consecrate the Rhone, that bodies might be thrown in the river without delay, as the churchyards would no longer hold them.

Italy is said to have lost half its inhabitants; Germany, which escaped more lightly, lost a million and a quarter; and Spain, France, and Austria also suffered very considerably. In England the death-rate was even higher than in the rest of Europe. The churches were deserted, the sittings of the King's Bench and of Parliament were suspended—which, by the way, seems to have been the one good effect that the plague produced. In London alone, at least 100,000 victims succumbed, while in Norwich about 50,000 were killed, and other towns suffered proportionally.

At intervals during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, the plague recurred in nearly all parts of Europe; and thus had a considerable influence in keeping back the population.

As illustrating the effect of disease in keeping down the population of savage tribes, the observations of Mr. W. W. Hunter are interesting. Speaking of the hill-tribes of India, he says that, since vaccination has been introduced, other pestilences mitigated, and war repressed, they have increased so rapidly that they have spread into the adjoining districts and been compelled to work for hire. (“Annals of Rural Bengal,” 1868, p. 259.)

Probably a more important and more general check among savage nations is afforded by infanticide and abortion. These practices are still prevalent in many parts of the world, and in former times were much more general than at present. Infanticide was indeed recommended by several old philosophers as the only safeguard against overpopulation, but it is scarcely likely to become customary in any modern civilized state; although Dr. Lankester stated, not long ago, that “there were in London alone 16,000 women who had murdered their offspring.”

In the past, large numbers of people have been mown down by war, which has thus constituted another very strong check on population. In Greece, and still more in Italy, the neighboring states were constantly making predatory attacks on one another, and these entailed great loss of life.

The effect of war on population, however, is seen, not only in the number of men killed on the battle-field, but also in the increased number of deaths from hunger following on the destruction of the crops by the invading forces.

Such, roughly, are the main weapons which nature has used in the past to counterbalance the inherent tendency in mankind to procreate more children than are wanted. It will readily be seen that their combined effect must have been enormous, and furnish a sufficient answer to Mr. George's somewhat foolish question. It would not have been necessary to spend so much time in considering these checks, were it not for the fact that Mr. George is invariably quoted as offering the strongest arguments against the Malthusian contention.

Now all the positive checks which we have just mentioned are undoubtedly tending to disappear, or have already disappeared. Better sanitation and the advance of medical science are each year rendering us less liable to those diseases and pestilences which carried off so many of our ancestors; arbitration will soon replace war among all civilized countries; and, now that we are less and less dependent on our own food-supplies and more tending to deal in the world-market, a general famine is, to say the least, a very improbable contingency.

Now, we have said that pressure of population is unable to force people to accept a lower standard of living than the standard current at the particular time and place. The question will, therefore, naturally arise as to what checks are operative in an advanced and civilized country, such as England is supposed to be; or, in other words, how is it that, although so many positive checks have disappeared, population in this country yet increases more slowly than wealth?

This question is not easy of complete answer, owing to the absence of sufficient statistical information on the subject. We may, however, sum up the main checks operative in England at the present time under the heads of insanitary conditions and parental prudence, or direct human control of the birth-rate. To these may be added, as of lesser account, prostitution, emigration, and incapacity.

The effect of insanitary conditions is of course especially seen in the high death-rate which exists among the poorer classes. In 1877, Sir Edwin Chadwick stated that in one part of a London district with good sanitation the death-

rate amounted to 11·3 per thousand, whereas in the other part of the same district with poorer sanitation the death-rate was about fifty per thousand. In 1873, Mr. Ansell showed that among the upper classes, out of 100,000 children born, only 8,045 die in the first year of life; whereas Dr. Farr gives 14,949 as the number throughout the general population. Of the children who had passed the age of one year, 4,684 per 100,000 died under five among the upper classes, and 11,369 among the general population.


From a comparison of Mr. Ansell's and Dr. Farr's tables, Dr. Drysdale has calculated "that the mean age at death in the upper classes is about 55 years, against 41 years among the general English population. According to the English Life Table," he says, "the average annual rate of mortality among children and adults under 60 is 17·5 per thousand; but the Upper Class Table shows it to be only 10·46 per thousand among the richer classes. During the year 1873, there died in England and Wales 368,179 persons between these ages; but if the rate of mortality had not exceeded the 'Upper Class' rate, only 226,040 would have died. Hence in one year, 142,130 persons died who would have lived had they been more comfortable."

In 1886, whereas the death-rate per thousand in London was 16 in the rich districts, it amounted to 24·4 in the poor ones. And in the same year in Dublin the death-rates of the rich and poor were respectively 13·4 and 33·7 per 1000.

In the course of his address to the Association of Sanitary Inspectors in 1888, Sir Edwin Chadwick stated that among the gentry and professional persons the deaths of children under five years of age in Brighton formed 8·93 per cent. of the total deaths, while among the wage-earning classes they formed 45·44 per cent. He also said that in Brighton the mean age at death for the wage-earners is 28·8 years, for the idle rich 63 years.

Dr. Playfair has shown that 18 per cent. of the children of the upper class, 36 per cent. of those of the tradesmen class, and 55 per cent. of those of the workmen die before they reach five years of age.

We may for convenience include accidents as resulting from insanitary conditions. We learn from the Registrar-General's Report for 1888, that in that year 14,908 people died from accidents in England alone.



The Board of Trade Report on "Railway Accidents" for the year 1889 shows that 435 railway servants were killed and 2,769 injured by accidents on the line in that year.

The effect of bad sanitary conditions is thus seen to be by no means insignificant in checking the growth of population.

The extent to which parental prudence is exercised in this country is difficult to be ascertained with any degree of certainty. The only available statistics which can help us at all are the birth-rate statistics for a number of years, from a comparison of which we are able to form a rough idea of the amount of parental prudence practised.

Commencing with 1876, when the birth-rate in England and Wales was 36·3 per thousand living, we find it steadily decreasing. In 1880 it was 34; in 1884, 33; and in 1887, 31. The difference in these numbers may fairly be attributed to the direct parental control of the birth-rate.

Another existing check to population is afforded by prostitution, due to the fact that prostitutes are almost invariably sterile. The number of prostitutes in London alone has been estimated at 12,000, the greater number of whom have been driven to this wretched employment by the absurdly insufficient remuneration offered them in return for honest work.

The last check which we must notice is that provided by emigration. In 1888 as many as 279,928 persons left Great Britain, of whom 170,822 were English. In the same year the number of immigrants only amounted to 128,879. Between 1815 and 1871, some 6,674,000 left our shores for other countries. The total effect of such withdrawals as these figures indicate cannot be lightly dismissed as of no account.

Such, then, are the active agents of repression at the present time, and it is evidently these or some new alternatives to which we must look to operate in the future. Insanitary conditions we mean to abolish, the infantile mortality we mean to diminish, and, therefore, unless a diminution of the birth-rate occur, the adult death-rate must, in all probability, ultimately increase proportionately.

What, then, are the forces to which we look as likely to lead to a lessening of the birth-rate? and what are the forces to which the opponents of Socialism look to effect the same end?

Our opponents maintain that only as long as people have to bear the whole expense of rearing the children which they have created, will there be any hope of inducing them to limit the size of their families. They point to France as an illustration of their contention; for there we see the whole mass of the people so limiting the number of their children that population only just manages to advance at all. What is the result? Just the result that Socialists would expect—the majority of the people in nearly as great a state of poverty as our countrymen, with our small number of large landowners represented by a large number of small landowners. We thus learn that no amount of parental prudence is of much use while land and capital remain in the hands of individuals, who are thus enabled to appropriate the socially-produced rent and interest for their own use.

The first effect of the introduction of a considerable instalment of Socialism would, undoubtedly, be the abolition or diminution of the worst forms of existing poverty. Now, we find that at present extreme poverty has the effect of impelling people to breed their hardest; that is to say, that the birth-rate is highest in the very poorest ranks of society.

The following table, from the Registrar-General's Annual Report for 1886, gives the relative age at marriage in different social conditions; widows and widowers being left out of account.

Average ages at marriage of Bachelors and Spinsters in Occupational Groups, 1884-85.

Occupations.	Bachelors.	Spinsters.
Miners	24·06	22·46
Textile Hands	24·38	23·43
Shoemakers, Tailors	24·92	24·31
Artisans	25·35	23·70
Laborers	25·56	23·66
Commercial Clerks	26·25	24·43
Shopkeepers and Shopmen	26·67	24·22
Farmers and Sons	29·23	26·91
Professional and Independent Class...	31·22	26·40

From this table we learn that the more comfortable the position of any class, the more prudent are its members; and, although this is shown at present by a later age at marriage, there is every reason to expect that when early

marriages and the application of methods preventive of conception have replaced present day prudence—*i.e.*, abstinence—limitation of families will be induced by exactly the same forces as do or would apply at present.

In his work on *Over-Population*, W. T. Thornton urged the same contention as is proved by the statistics we have just quoted. "A half-starved wretch," he says, "who has only rags to wear, and a ruined mud-hovel to sleep in, knows that he cannot be more despised, though he may be more pitied, if the holes in his cheeks and coat, and in the roof of his shed, become twice as wide as at present. Neither is the absence of shame, on account of the outward appearance, supplied, as might be expected, by increased dread of the more real ills of poverty. On the contrary, it seems that the more wretched a man is, the more heedless he is about increasing his misery. If he were in easy circumstances he would be reluctant to risk any of his comforts; but a very poor man may have no comforts to lose. If his means be barely sufficient to appease the cravings of nature, without affording him any positive gratification, he may think that, being already so badly off, he cannot become much worse; and that it is not worth while to practise present self-denial, from the dread of a slight increase of future privation. He might possibly be disposed to postpone the indulgence of his inclinations, if there were a chance of his condition improving; but, if he have no such hope, the present opportunity may seem as unobjectionable as any that is likely to occur. He may persuade himself that it will be for his advantage to marry early, that his sons may be able to assist him in his old age, when he would otherwise be altogether destitute. He may reason in this manner, if he think at all, but it is more likely that his misfortunes will have rendered him inconsiderate and reckless. With so gloomy a prospect before him he may prefer to close his eyes upon the future, and, caring only for the present moment, he may snatch at any means of alleviating his sorrows, without calculating the cost. Be this as it may, it is certain that the prudential considerations which constitute the only voluntary restraint on marriage, and which sometimes exercise even an excessive influence amongst the rich, are absolutely powerless amongst the very poor."

In 1886 the birth-rate of the poor districts of London was 24.4 per 1,000, whereas it was only 16 per 1,000 in the rich districts. In Dublin the proportion was 15 to 5, and other towns afforded similar numbers. In a recent number of the *MALTHUSIAN* appeared some statistics from New York which showed that in Fifth Avenue 300 families had only produced 91 children in ten years, whereas in Cherry Hill the same number of families had produced 660 children in the same time.

From these statistics, and the infinite others which might be collected, it is clear that everything which tends to make the condition of the people better, and which tends to the greater equalisation of wealth, tends also to check the growth of population. Therefore we believe that by improving the material and mental surroundings of the poor, by the provision of free libraries, open spaces, half holidays, better homes, better workshops, decent wages, and the rest, we are doing more to induce the mass of the people to limit their families than could possibly be effected by rhetorical appeals alone. For only after these reforms have been won is there any hope that the generality of wage-earners will be sufficiently hopeful, and sufficiently thoughtful, to care two pence for any recommendation which entails the slightest exercise of effort on their part. As John Stuart Mill says: "It is difficult to make those feel the value of comfort who have never enjoyed it, or those appreciate the wretchedness of a precarious subsistence who have been made reckless by always living from hand to mouth. Individuals often struggle upwards into a condition of ease; but the utmost that can be expected from a whole people is to maintain themselves in it; and improvement in the habits and requirements of the mass of unskilled day-laborers will be difficult and tardy, unless means can be contrived of raising the entire body to a state of tolerable comfort, and maintaining them in it until a new generation grows up."

Another reform desired by almost all Socialists is the politic and economic independence of women; and it is the attainment of this goal to which we may look as the most effective check on future population. As long as the existing relic of chattel slavery continues with us, there is but little hope of diminishing our absurdly excessive birth-rate. For the majority of women, at present, marriage is the only

available means of obtaining a decent livelihood, and to it they are taught to look as the sole end and aim of their existence. A woman who does not breed a family of children is ranked as unorthodox, and is viewed with more or less pity by her—as they rank themselves—more fortunate sisters; and a woman who devotes herself to public work is looked upon with a certain, though diminishing, amount of horror. So complete has their degradation and general demoralisation become, that even when an occasional woman happens to be economically independent of man, she is so artificially environed that she is generally unable to root out the ideas which have been forced upon her. Thus we find Schopenhauer making use of this truth to prove the natural inferiority of women: “That woman is by nature meant to obey may be seen by the fact that every woman who is placed in the unnatural position of complete independence, immediately attaches herself to some man, by whom she allows herself to be guided and ruled. It is because she needs a lord and master. If she is young, it will be a lover; if she is old, a priest.”

We cannot but feel that these remarks are in the main true, although we shall probably differ from the conclusion drawn from them. Such is the trust which woman places in man; how does he respond to it? In a recent number of the *Westminster Review* appeared an article which contained some interesting statistics which will help us to answer this question:—

“About fifteen years ago, in Edinburgh, the men printers struck for shorter hours, and women were introduced to defeat them. The women’s wages are from 4s. (girls) to 20s., and the men’s are from 4s. (boys) to 30s. per week; and it is to the employers of these women that the Government work in Edinburgh is sent to be printed. Again at the Army and Navy Stores Printing Works in London, women are employed at wages below half the scale wages of men.”

In the making of cigarettes, whereas men receive from 2s. 6d. to 3s. per thousand, women are only paid from 1s. 3d. to 2s. 3d. for the same number. At these rates, a girl by working hard all the week can often produce no more than six shillings.

What wonder is it that these poor girls are tempted to increase their miserable pittance by a resort to the only means which a brutal and hypocritical society leaves them? Under other and better conditions they would probably have been useful and happy members of society instead of leading the miserable life of a city prostitute. This applies not only to the girls and women of the working class, but also to those who belong to the upper and middle classes. For the majority even of better class women there is only one means of obtaining a decent livelihood and of attaining the much-coveted respectability; and that means is the same as is resorted to by their poorer sisters, namely prostitution—in this case, however, socially and legally recognised, and commonly called marriage. This last course is even more socially injurious than the former; for whereas promiscuous prostitution is practically unaccompanied by child-birth, the same unfortunately cannot be said of what we may call monandrous prostitution.

Fortunately, however, such a condition is not destined to last. In almost all civilised countries we see the economic emancipation of women proceeding step by step with that of the manual workers. And we find that women are more and more coming to see that there is something in life besides child-bearing and suckling. They are tending to take more active interest in public questions, as well as in science and art; in other words, their characteristic human elements are gradually coming to compete with those elements which they possess in common with the rabbit. An inevitable result of this tendency will be that no woman will care to bear and rear a *large number* of children, and so sacrifice her strength and the best years of her life in the performance of a purely animal function.

To realise how inevitably this will result, it is only necessary to reflect on the great repugnance which most men would feel to bearing and rearing for themselves more than a very limited number of children. If we bear this fact in mind, we cannot but conclude that as women come to take an interest in affairs outside their neighbor's tongue they also will object to do nothing but combine the functions of hen and incubator. We see to-day that the earliest marriages take place, as a general rule, amongst the most ignorant; and that the more thoughtful people do not

marry until much later. This is the only way they see which will not make them parents before they desire it. It would generally be far better if, instead of this precaution, they married and took measures to procrastinate parentage until they were prepared to welcome it. These precautions might consist either in abstinence from sexual intercourse, or, in the case of those to whom this would be irksome—namely, the great majority—in the use of mechanical preventives of conception. For it is clear that once the age of puberty is reached, any considerable restraint in the performance of a natural physiological function can but be injurious—always physically, and often mentally in addition. Of course, as a matter of fact, the majority of men who are timid of parentage do not practise restraint, but help to encourage the prostitution which is such a disgrace to almost all the towns of Europe. How much better in every way if, instead of this body-selling, healthy sexual connection took place between those who desired it, accompanied or unaccompanied, according to the circumstances, by conception and consequent child-bearing.

Of course the irrational sentimentalist will bring forward his rather aged and decrepit objection that the use of mechanical agents in this connection is unnatural. He is quite right, and, to be logical, should extend his objection to shirts, steel pens, pocket handkerchiefs, lightning conductors, umbrellas, surgical instruments, and the infinite other things which, although unnatural—*i.e.*, not provided by nature—have been found by man to assist him in the exercise of his natural functions or in the overcoming of Nature's assaults on him. Progress indeed may be roughly defined as the overcoming of Nature by the exercise of reason. Thus the building of houses may be considered as the result of man's reason employed in the work of counter-acting Nature's attacks: using Nature in the sense of the Universe outside ourselves. And so with all the other products of civilisation from balloons to air-guns. It is therefore very silly to object to the use of mechanical preventives of conception on the ground that God did not send them ready made.

We have seen that, under Socialism, two very strong checks will exist which are inoperative at present, namely, the non-existence of extreme poverty and the economic

independence of women. Another powerful agent in keeping down the population, which does not exist at present, will be the universality and extension of education. We shall find that with the spread of education, people will adopt saner ideas of marriage and of population. One school of physiologists, indeed, maintains that the spread of education will of itself so diminish natural or potential fertility that all fear of an excessive population will be swept away. It may be so; but in that case we have scarcely a pleasant prospect before us. If the cultured, refined women of the present day are types of the women of the future, we may as well lay aside all discussion of ultimate states of society, and act on the motto "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Surely our ideal woman is not the nervous, highly-strung woman of to-day, who certainly is incapable of bearing many or healthy children. And, if we had to choose between such and the healthy woman of fifty years ago, surely no sane man would choose the former. Our aim is, not to develop the mind at the expense of the body, but to endeavor to approach the old ideal "*Mens sana in corpore sano.*"

The way, therefore, in which we should desire the educational check to operate is not in the direction of diminished potential fertility, but in the direction of rational control of the birth-rate, that is to say of the maintenance of *potential* fertility *as such*.

Dr. Russel Wallace has argued that one effect of education will be to put off marriage to a much later period than at present. He says that it is very improbable that the woman of the future will marry until she has reached at least the age of 25 and generally the age of 30. He then quotes Mr. Francis Galton as having shown that the fertility of women married at 29 and that of women married at 20 is in the proportion of 5 to 8. Dr. Wallace contends further that by thus delaying the period of marriage, "the time between successive generations is correspondingly lengthened; while a still further effect is produced by the fact that the greater the average age at marriage the fewer generations are alive at the same time, and it is the combined effect of these three factors that determines the actual increase of the population."

It is not, however, late marriages to which we should look as the method of prudence, but rather, as we have said before, to comparatively early marriages coupled with the exercise of prudence after marriage. The most complete statistics bearing on this point are to be found in an article by the celebrated French doctor Bertillon, on Marriage, in the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de Science Médicales*. He found that between the ages of 20 and 25 the comparative mortality of bachelors and husbands was in the ratio of 144 to 100; between the ages of 25 and 30, the mortality is as 163 to 100. According to Dr. Drysdale, the judicial statistics of France show that "out of 1,000,000 of single men, there are 273 suicides, whilst 1,000,000 of widowers furnish no less than 628; whereas in a like number of married men there are only 246." In Scotland it has been shown in the same way (Paper by Dr. James Stark on "The Influence of Marriage on the Mean Mortality of the two Sexes in Scotland"; Royal Society of Edinburgh, December, 1886) that between the ages of 20 and 25 there are 1,174 deaths among 100,000 bachelors, whilst among the same number of married men there are only 597, or about one-half. Of course, the value of such statistics as these must not be rated very high, for many bachelors are such simply owing to the fact that they are below the average in vitality, either through vicious habits or inherited weakness. Still, when we consider that similar statistics are obtainable in the case of widowers, it seems probable that **not** restraint, but control, is the wise course to adopt. In either case, however, nothing will be accomplished until after a very considerable extension of education.

To sum up, then, we have seen that there is a tendency in population to increase faster than the means of subsistence can be increased. In the past this tendency has been checked by wars, pestilences and famines, which are now replaced by poverty, insanitary conditions of all kinds, and prudence. In the future it is hoped that a due control of the birth-rate will replace all other checks. We have seen that a low birth-rate is, and can only be, induced by the abolition of poverty, the spread of education, and the emancipation of women; and these are the objects of Socialists; from which it follows that only through Socialism is there any prospect in this country of the general

practice of Malthusianism. Therefore all earnest reformers will see that the population question, like all other economic questions, waits for solution with the reorganisation of society.

There is one other question which it is necessary to touch in any paper dealing with this subject, and that is the question of legal restriction. There is, we believe, no reason to doubt that the reorganisation of production and distribution, together with the other reforms we have mentioned, will of themselves solve the population difficulty. But, if not, the Socialist has a never-failing cure to fall back upon. If, in a Socialist state, the spread of reason and the pressure of public opinion were found insufficient to limit the birth-rate, the law might step in and fix the maximum number of children per family. Any children beyond this number would of course be reared in exactly the same manner as others, but the parents might be fined such an amount as would meet the additional expense incurred.

This, however, is only a last resource to which it is improbable we shall ever be forced.

It is important to remember, however, that this, like every other line of Population reform, could only be followed by Socialists, and could not possibly be advocated by the consistent Individualist.

Meanwhile, the importance of the Population Question cannot be overrated. All around us we see the havoc perpetrated by this cruel law of Nature. There is an old Eastern saying that the bird will not approach the grain when it sees another bird a captive in the snare. Let us take warning by the mischance of others, that others may not take warning by ours.



Postscript.

THE paper now printed was read on June 26, 1891, the writer then being only nineteen years of age. A further consideration of the subject and a somewhat fuller understanding of life have led him to modify at any rate one of the views then expressed. He has thought it better, however, to leave the paper as written, than so to alter it as entirely to represent his present opinions. The essay was written as a protest against the general apathy with which even so-called "advanced" sociologists are wont to regard the question of population.

It was probably this which led the writer to treat as unworthy every sentiment, [making the common error of confusing it with sentimentality—the latter being probably the most despicable of all vices. While still agreeing with almost all the opinions advanced or defended in the essay, he believes that the method of prudence advocated by John Stuart Mill, and more recently by Messrs. Geddes and Thomson in their excellent little book entitled, "The Evolution of Sex," is infinitely more desirable than that advocated in the preceding pages. At the same time he cannot blind himself to the fact that for a long time to come the great majority of people will turn a deaf ear to all such counsel. For these the arguments in this pamphlet still hold good in their entirety.

H. ROBERTS.

Cct. 1st, 1892.

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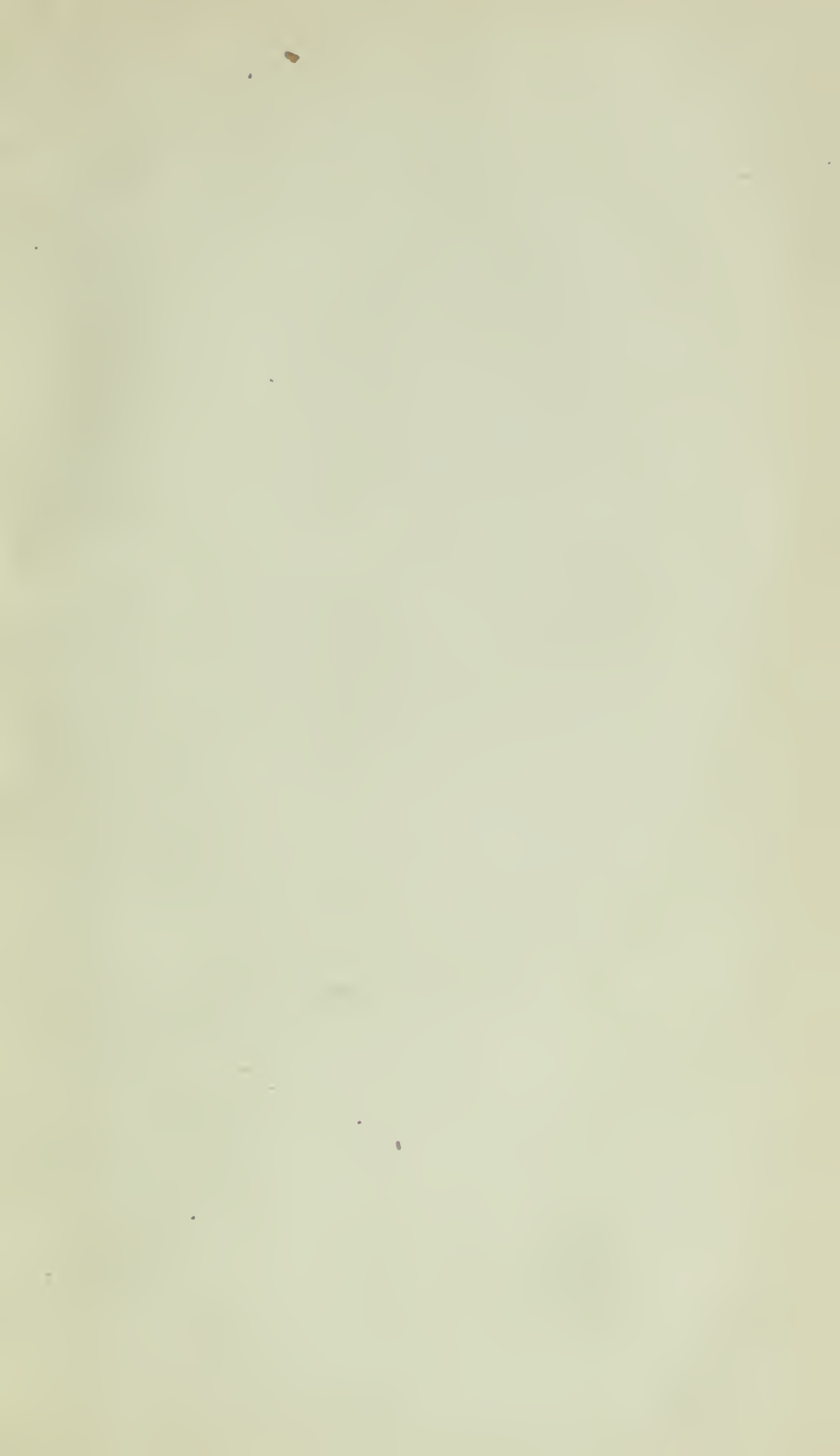
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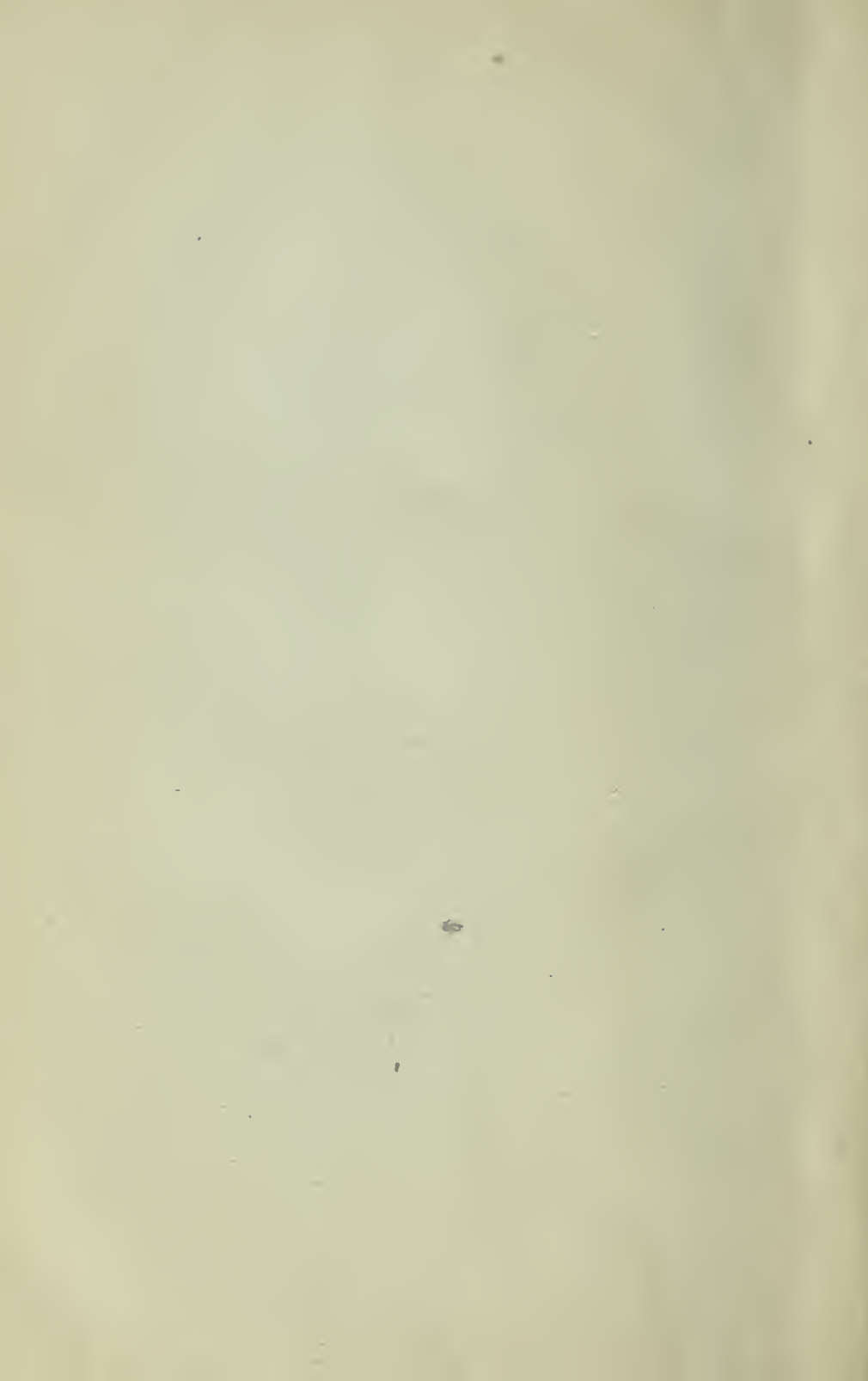
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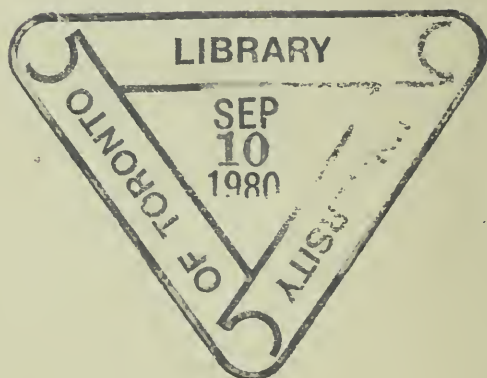
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